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Mötley Crüe

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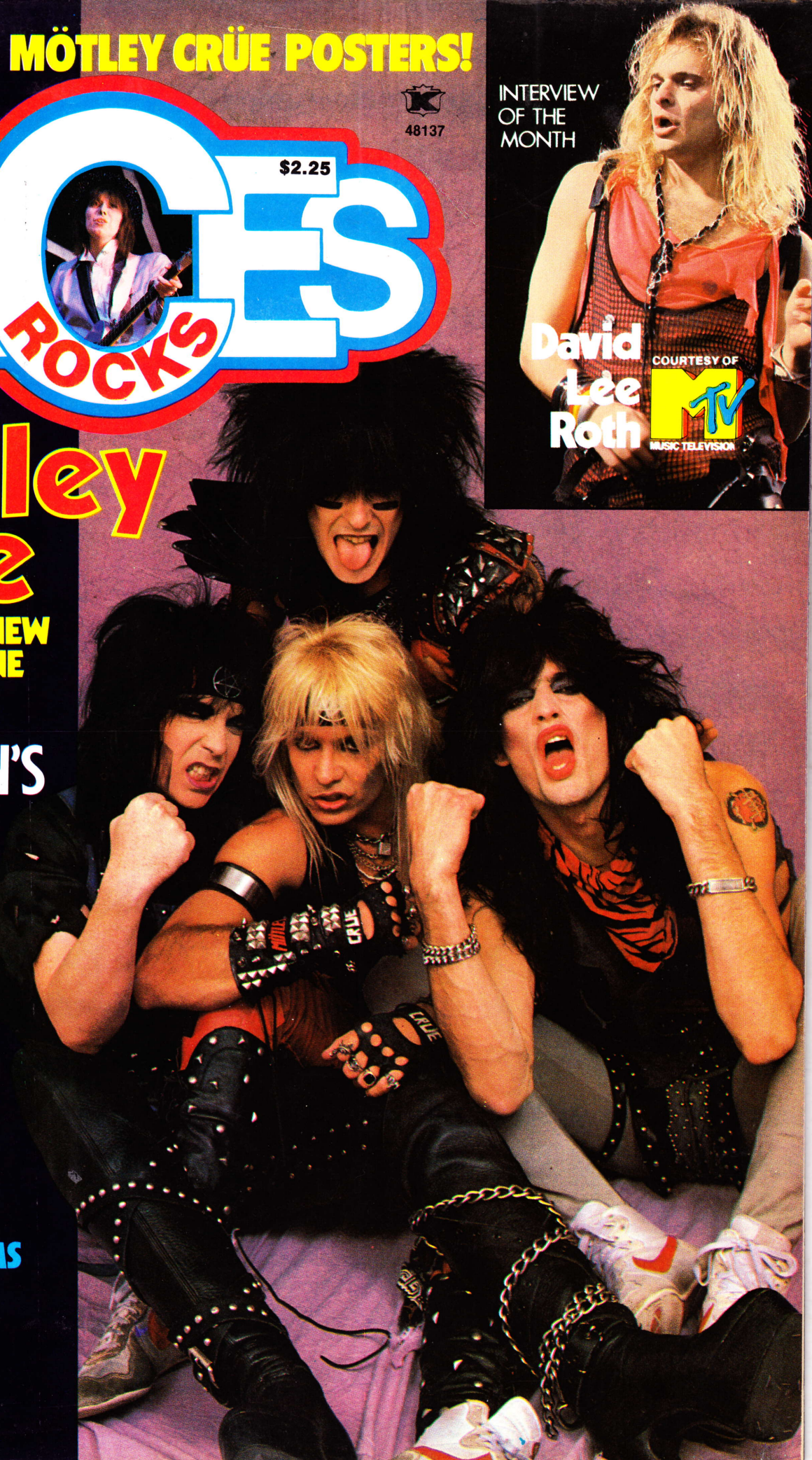
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MÖTLEY CRÜE

SHOUTING AT THE DEVIL AND SHOOTING OFF THEIR MOUTHS

BY FRANK LOVECE

The late Ethel Merman was right: There's no business like show business. You may have noticed that she accentuated the business end of that phrase, and that may help you understand the megabuck success of Mötley Crüe. Despite the leather and makeup, these guys are rock 'n' roll Reaganites.

The concept of bands-as-business certainly isn't new; that's the basis of the music industry and of many of the performers themselves, who know that art and 40¢ will get you a cup of coffee. Mötley Crüe, however, has perfected the concept: When Nikki Sixx, the bass player and principal song-scribbler, thought a reporter would write negatively about the band, he did his best G. Gordon Liddy—spreading lies and rumors—to try to have the reporter removed from the story. This particular attempt failed, but it goes to show that the band's "bad boy" image has some truth to it—even though the members are more likely to use memos than meat cleavers.

That image, of course, is a reworking of the successful Kiss/Alice Cooper formula, by which the delightfully superficial theater and gaudy stage presence of glitter rock catered to the requirements of Top 40 radio. Mötley Crüe has aped the formula most profitably. The twist is that while Kiss was a paragon of self-parody, these guys are the flip-side: self-proclaimed bad-ass rock 'n' rollers.

Mötley Crüe is, however, no less a put-on. Even though Sixx insists that, "Our image is our lifestyle," the band showed up for their interview in the conventional male-*Flashdance*-black-leather uniforms of sooooo many other new groups. Since Sixx also insists that, "We don't owe anything to an image," the contradiction reveals the artifice.

The band began in Los Angeles a little more than three years ago. As Sixx puts it, "I was a local star," playing around L.A. in a band called London. But "I was frustrated. I wanted to do harder rock." He obtained a drummer, Tommy Lee, from a band called Suite 19; a vocalist, Vince Neil, from Rock Candy; and a lead guitarist, Mick Mars, from the want ads.

The music was, as it is now, horny-teenage angst, deliberately and extremely sexist. The makeup and stage routines became more and more extravagant as it became evident that the surf was up once again for heavy-metal bands. Yet while one is tempted to recall the line from *The Maltese Falcon*—"The cheaper the punk, the gaudier the patter"—it turns out that Mötley Crüe, image aside, has worked Horatio-Alger-hard these three years. "We played cowboy bars, if you can believe that," says Neil. "Behind chicken wire, like in *The Blues Brothers*." Sixx recalls that, "At Pooky's Sandwich Shop"—not a colorfully named club, a *real*

sandwich shop—"we got paid \$12 and our beer tab came to \$137."

Despite such credit-debit debacles, the band soon learned that turning heavy metal into precious metal would take some shrewd maneuvering. Fortunately for Mötley Crüe, when it comes to business, the Exxon Corporation could pick up Sixx. "We started investing our own money in ads," he details. "We always invested what we made." The band's rise to prominence he describes as "a building process. We're not an overnight success. Take a band like Quiet Riot. They went platinum six months after they formed. Now they're under tremendous pressure to follow up." (That's what's known as out-of-control growth" in corporate lingo.) "We've built up slowly, kept building fans. We got a lot of stuff ready for when we hit." (The trickle-up philosophy, you might say.) In his best here's-a-bargain-for-you-voice, Neil even describes Mötley in concert as "a \$50 show for a \$10 ticket."

As a lot of ambitious bands do, Mötley Crüe pooled its capital resources about a year ago to form Leathur (sic) Records, a do-it-yourself label that pressed a thousand copies of a single, "Stick to Your Guns" backed with "The Toast of the Town."

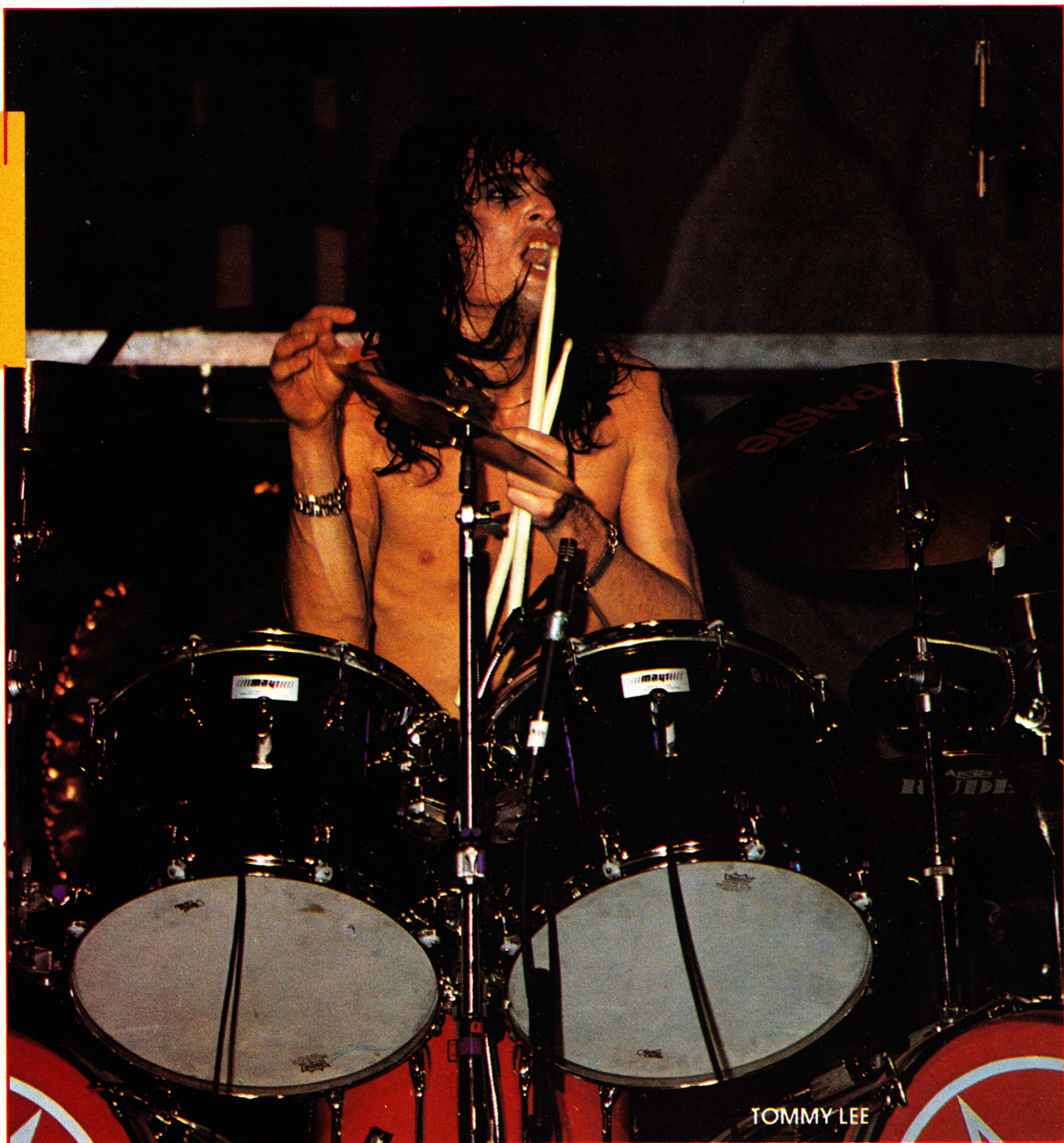
After that, relates Sixx, "We took our club act and pressed our own LP, *Too Fast for Love*," distributing, he estimates,

about 40,000 copies. Then, in an echo of Boston—whose demo tape, produced in Tom Sholz's basement, ended up, essentially intact, as that band's first album—Mötley Crüe's "demo tape on vinyl" was picked up by Elektra/Asylum, remixed by producer Roy Thomas Baker, and released as the self-titled *Mötley Crüe*. That album is now playing catch-up to their second, *Shout at the Devil*, which has gone platinum.

Shout is a lumbering mock-epic—formulaic, but apparently with the right formula to sell some records. If you want to pound your head without having to bear Ted Nugent's screeching or Jim Steinman's pretensions, *Shout* fills the need. There's little, if anything, new or adventurous to threaten you. In fact, the album concept even swipes from Black Sabbath, Uriah Heep, and all those other pseudo-mystical bands

from the rather innocently fun first era of hard-pomp (as in pompous) rock.

The cover of *Shout at the Devil* displays a pentagram, which, as readers of H. P. Lovecraft and other tellers of horrific tales already know, is a symbol said to ward off werewolves. Aside from being an obvious way of, uh, keeping up heavy metal's traditions, however, the band chose a pentagram, explains Sixx, straightfaced, because "it



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(A swastika. That probably would have limited the market. Bad business, right? At least that's what the similarly blind Motorhead found out. Dig this: A swastika mentality is selling records by the trainload.)

Sixx goes on, oblivious. "I listen to the kids. And what we're telling them is not to take any shit from anybody, to be what you wanna be. If you want to do something, I say do it." But

what about what Elektra Records wants you to do, not to mention the compromises inherent in business? "I like Elektra," answers Sixx, "but the day they cut our freedom, we'll cut out."

It all comes down to what Mötley Crüe's press bio says is an image "dripping with impure and adulturated (sic) lust and a take-no-shit-grab-some-tit attitude." The image-making game is old, but these guys—ranging from 21 to 26 years of age—

aren't. That's what makes Sixx' Nixonian efforts to kill a story—and the calculated outrage generated by the swastika remark—so disturbing.

Regardless, the man and his band are, for the moment, near the top of their profession. Album sales are phenomenal; so are concert crowds. Somewhere, at this very moment, someone is listening to their album, while watching *The A-Team* or *Three's Company*, a McDonald's burger in hand. □